



# Practice Guidance: Adoption By Sibling Adopters



Bath & North East  
Somerset Council



Wiltshire Council





considered as an adoptive home when the placement order is made. In these circumstances a careful balance needs to be made about progressing with an EP placement against the long-term benefits of growing up with a sibling. Therefore, a Professionals meeting (see 6 below) should be held to consider this issue and decide the appropriate plan for the child, which may include a foster placement and consideration of any arrangements for the child having connections with the sibling's adopted family.

5. The prospective adopter may express an interest in adopting the sibling verbally to the Family Finder/Adoption Social Worker or Child Social Worker and must be advised to submit this formally in writing to the appropriate Head of Service in the respective local authority. The child's social worker and family finder should be informed immediately. The sibling adopter should be advised of this process and the following steps regarding making a decision for the child and responding to their expression of interest.

- BANES - Head of Service: Care Outcomes
- Bristol - Head of Service: Permanency and Specialist Services
- Gloucestershire – Head of Service: Permanence
- North Somerset – Head of Service: Family Support and Safeguarding
- Sth Glos – Head of Integrated Children's Services
- Wiltshire – Head of Service: Children in care and young people

(Please note this 'expression of interest' **is not** a Notice of Intention to Adopt for a non-agency adoption (Adoption and Children Act 2002 s44).)

The local authority should acknowledge this initial expression of interest

### **Making a decision if it is in the child's best interests to progress the plan for adoption with the sibling adopters**

For children who have a Should be Placed for Adoption Decision, in current care proceedings or when a Placement or Care order has been made, the following process should be followed.

6. A professionals meeting should be arranged and chaired by the local authority Team Manager to discuss the response to the expression of interest and agree the next steps.

7.

8. The following people should be invited to the meeting:

- Local Authority Team Manager and social worker

- Adoption West Family Finder
- Adoption West Recruitment and Assessment manager
- IRO
- Adoption West Adopters' Social Worker, if relevant

The meeting will consider any specific issues that need to be considered as part of a viability/initial assessment, identify which workers will complete the assessment and timescales for this to happen. Adoption West will allocate a R&A social worker to complete the assessment visit with the child's social worker and the siblings adopters details will be added to CHARMS, the Adoption West case management system

Minutes of the professionals meeting should be taken and shared with all parties and saved on the case management systems for both the local authority and Adoption West.

9. The viability of adopters' potential to adopt and meet the child/rens long term needs is a joint piece of work undertaken by the relevant social worker for the child and an Adoption West social worker. The initial viability to adopt assessment should have a minimum of two visits to cover the issues below and provide the adopters with the opportunity between visits to reflect on the issues raised.
10. The assessment should focus on
  - The current circumstances of the family and needs of their adopted child
  - Capacity to care for another child emotionally, practically and financially
  - Consideration of whether EP is a possibility and how the family would manage this
  - The view of the IRO
  - The view of Adoption Support
  - Consideration given to the views of the birth family
  - Views of any other relevant agency e.g. CAMHS
  - Likely support needed including financial considerations
11. This is a joint report and should be signed by both social workers. Any difference of opinion between the child's social worker and the Adoption West social worker should be addressed at Team Manager level and if necessary escalated to Service Managers in the respective agencies.

12. This assessment should be completed within 28 days from the initial professionals meeting. The report must be shared with the child's IRO, child's team manager and the Adoption West team manager.
13. A second professionals meeting should be held within 14 days of the completion of the assessment. This should be chaired by the Team Manager for the child (or Service Manager if needed – see above) and include the relevant social worker for the child and Adoption West social worker. The IRO's views should be sought and included in the meeting. The meeting will consider the viability assessment and recommendations
14. Purpose of the meeting is to:
  - Discuss the outcome of the assessment and recommendation and any further actions required
  - Consider if there is evidence to indicate that the adopters could meet the long term needs of the child alongside their adopted child.
  - Consider whether there are any factors which might impact on the adopter's likelihood of meeting the requirements for a general adoption approval.
  - Decide whether the child should be linked for adoption with the sibling adopters
  - Decide whether the child could/should be placed via Early Permanence (if sibling placed is not yet adopted) or Reg 24, if sibling placed is adopted and pre-placement order i.e. Unborn baby or to avoid unnecessary delay
  - Agree the next steps – it is important that any further information required is sought at this stage and not to progress to a prospective adopters' assessment if the meeting doesn't have enough information to support the plan for adoption by the sibling adopter at this stage.
  - In some circumstances, where the sibling adopters live at a distance which would preclude AW from progressing an assessment an interagency agreement may need to be considered. The Child Social Worker will need to seek Inter Agency funding agreement.
  - the Family Finder will contact the approving agency to explore whether they can complete the assessment
15. The outcome of the meeting should be shared with:
  - The sibling adopters, within 1 day of the meeting and followed up in writing within 5 working days of the meeting. The meeting should agree who is best placed to share the outcome with the prospective adopters. If the outcome is negative feedback should be provided to the sibling adopters and a copy of the assessment report. Sibling

adopters do not have redress regarding linking decisions however may access the complaints procedure regarding process.

- the IRO via the child's social worker

16. The sibling adopters should confirm in writing to the child's social worker within 5 working days if they wish to progress the link and agree with the local authority's planned actions to progress the plans for the child.
17. Any request for financial support should be put in writing and sent to the relevant Head of Service for the local authority. Please refer to the specific Local Authority's Adoption Allowance process.
18. When the link for adoption between the child and the sibling adopters has been agreed, the child's CPR and medical must be shared and discussed with them by the child social worker and Adoption West social worker. The sibling adopters should be sent a Registration of Interest to complete, if Adoption West is undertaking the assessment, which initiates the checks and references and Stage 2 assessment process.
19. At this stage the child/ren will be linked to the sibling adopters and Adoption West will cease any other family finding activity for the child.
20. In some circumstances a child may be placed with a sibling who is placed for adoption but not yet adopted. The process should be followed up to this point but further approval of the adopter is not necessary. Early Permanence via Reg25a can be considered in this situation.

### **Prospective Adopter Assessment**

- The sibling adopters must complete a Registration of Interest and return this to Adoption West.
- Adoption West will allocate a Recruitment and Assessment social worker to complete the prospective adopter's assessment. This will normally be the social worker who was involved in the initial viability assessment, or the Adoption Social Worker who completed the original adopter's assessment, unless an Inter agency fee has been agreed and the assessment is being undertaken by another adoption agency.
- Second time adopters can go through a "fast track" reassessment and adoption approval process. AAR 2005 Guidance specifies that: *"It should be made clear to foster carers, or those who apply to be approved for specific children, that their assessment will be in respect of their suitability as adopters generally and that if they are approved, their suitability to adopt a specific*

*child or children will be addressed separately as part of the matching process”.*

- To prevent delay, the preferred practice is that the suitability of the second time adopter to adopt and the match of the child with the prospective adopters are presented to Adoption Panel on the same day (Reg32 (5) Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005 and guidance 4.33).
- The second time adopters will start the process in Stage 2 and Adoption West should complete the assessment of the adopters within 4 months of receipt of the registration of interest. The approval and match will be booked into the Adoption Panel by the Adoption Social Worker within 4 months of starting the assessment.
- In parallel to the prospective adopter's report being undertaken, the child's social worker and the Adoption social worker will ensure all preparations are made for the match including:
  - Prospective adopters meeting with the Medical Adviser
  - Child Information meeting
  - Completing the Adoption Placement Report and the Adoption Support Plan
- Second time adopters are requested to attend the adoption preparation stage 2 course if they previously attended more than two years ago.
- The prospective adopters will be invited to attend a meeting of the Adoption Panel when their suitability to adopt will be considered (AAR30A (5)). The applicants are not required to attend but should be encouraged to do so.
- The Adoption West Agency Decision Maker will make the decision regarding the second time adopters' suitability to adopt and the Local Authority Agency Decision Maker for the child will make the decision regarding the match per Reg 32 Adoption Agency Regulations 2005. To ensure timescales are met, the Adoption West ADM will make the decision within 2 working days of receipt of the panel minutes, and this will then be shared with the ADM responsible for the decision for the match.
- In exceptional circumstances, if the decision is to present the match to a different Adoption Panel, this should be no longer than 28 days after the approval panel, with required paperwork submitted 14 days prior to that panel. This allows time for the Agency Decision regarding the approval to be made.

Wherever possible the match should be heard by the same Adoption West panel/chair.

- If the child was placed under Reg 24/25a arrangements, when the Agency Decision has been made regarding the match between the child and second time adopter's, now approved adopters, the placement status must be changed to Placed for Adoption on the same day and LA records need to be updated.
- The Adoption Placement Planning Meeting chaired by the relevant Adoption West Team Manager should be held within 7 days of the decision and the Adoption Placement Plan completed by all parties. Tasks, responsibilities and timescales will be agreed for handover of life story book; completion of the later life letter, setting up of letterbox/direct contact arrangements.
- As the child/ren have lived with the prospective adopters for more than 10 weeks the application (A58) to the court for the Adoption Order can be made with immediate effect. The prospective adopters should be assisted in making the application which should be submitted with the Annex A within 14 days of the agency decision.
- To prevent delay the adoption social worker and child's social worker should complete the Annex A prior to the application being made, so that it can be submitted at the same time as the application.
- During the assessment of the prospective adopters, if information is provided that suggests that a recommendation of approval as suitable to adopt may not be possible, the AW team manager should convene a meeting with the child's social worker and team manager at the earliest opportunity. This meeting should consider the issues in relation to a possible negative recommendation, impact on the proposed link and any actions that are necessary in accordance with [The Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukreg/2005/1462)

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